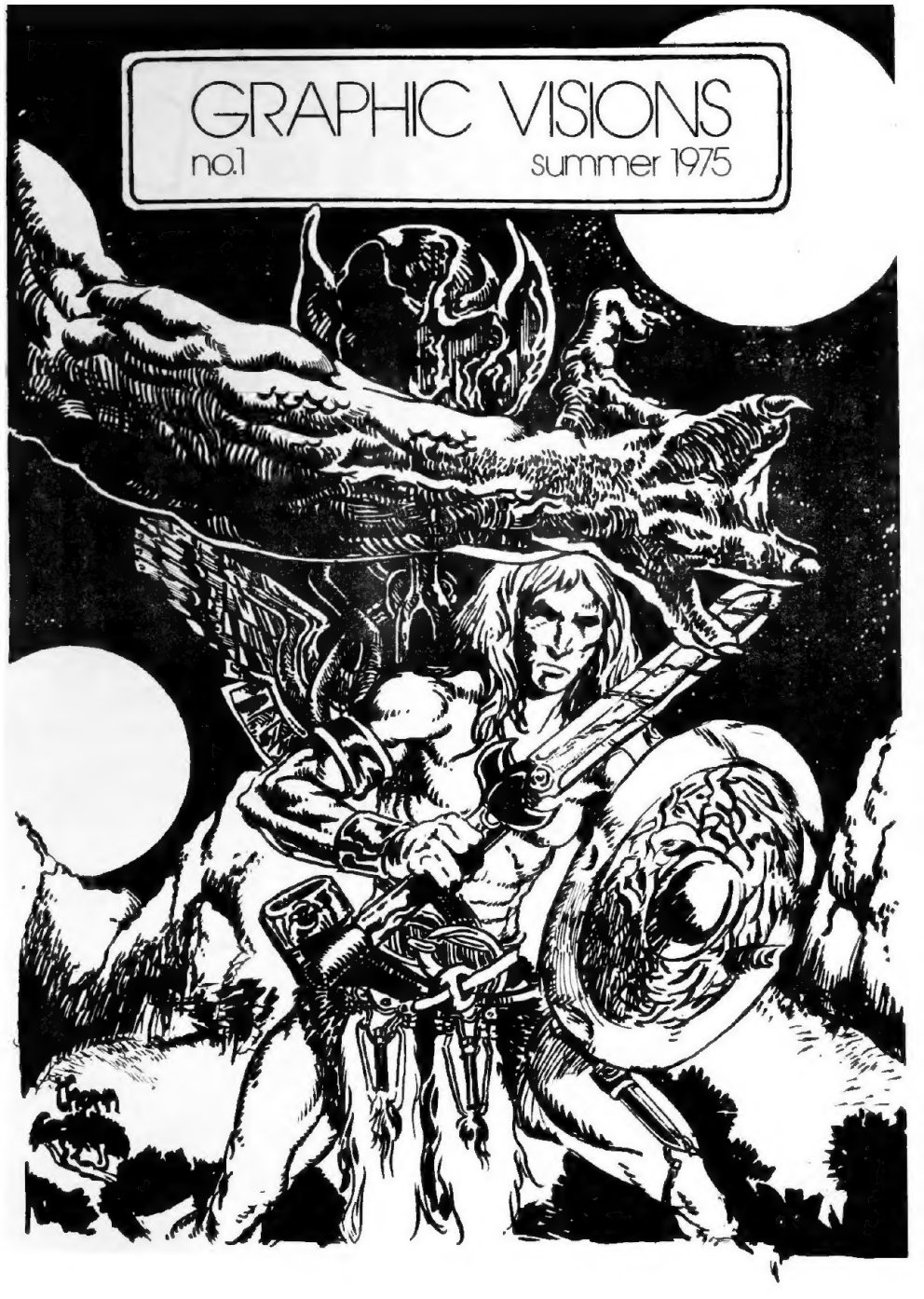

GRAPHIC VISIONS
no.1
summer 1975

·INFORMATION·

GRAPHIC VISIONS #1, Summer, 1975 issue. 60¢ a copy. Published by Christopher Lomelino, 1843 Brian Lane, Springfield, Illinois, 62703. Sorry, no subscriptions are currently available. No part of this publication may be reproduced without the written consent of the publisher. All characters herein are copyright their respective owners. Please make all checks/money orders payable to Chris Lomelino. Thank you.

Editor/Publisher:
Chris Lomelino

Assistant Editor:
Bob Jessup

Editorial Advisor:
Jim Main

Our cover: Swordsman and creature prepare to battle, as envisioned by Tom Artus.

CONTENTS

Front cover.....Tom Artus

editorial ramblings.Chris Lomelino....pg. 4

Update.....Jay L. Zilber.....pg. 7

Viewpoint: Atlas....Mike Dobbs.....pg. 14

Conan centerspread..Dan Adkins

On The Market.....Randy Medoff & friends.....pg. 18

Space Fillers.....Rod Snyder.....pg. 23

Reflections on the Phantom Stranger....Rich Morrissey...pg. 27

Back cover.....Bruce Patterson

ART CREDITS

Neal Adams.....pg. 22
Dan Adkins.....centerspread
Tom Artus.....pg. 1
Frank Cirocco.....pgs. 6, 31
Tim Conrad.....pg. 22
Michael Gustavich.....pg. 25
Larry Lankford.....pgs. 5,10
Bob Mosher.....pgs. 5,13,28
John Onoda.....pgs. 9,11
Bruce Patterson.....pg. 32
Gary Phillips.....pgs. 2,3
Russ Rainbolt.....pg. 12
Brent Richardson.....pg. 15
Stan Sakai.....pg. 30
Dave Sim.....pg. 26
Wes Smith.....pgs. 8,15,23,24
Carl Taylor...pgs. 12,15,23,24,25
Mercy Van Vlack.....pg. 21
Rick Williams.....pgs. 13,30

GRAPHIC VISIONS

editorial ramblings

Greetings, good people. Welcome to Graphic Visions!

Graphic Visions may not be the next RBCC or Comic Crusader (how's that for a little name dropping) but we do have variety. Herein there's something for just about everyone's tastes. If sword & sorcery is your cup of tea(personally I hate the stuff...the tea, not the sword & sorcery; which in most cases I do like), you should enjoy (whether you agree with Jay's opinions or not) the Zilber-type look at barbarians in the four-color world. If you like well written, well researched articles, you should really dig Batmania's own Rich Morrissey's contribution; a comprehensive look at the career of the Pantom Stranger. Maybe you'd like to compare your views of the new Atlas line of comics with those of GV staffer Mike Dobbs. Or would you like to hear fanzine editor Rod Snyder's critique of an over-commercialized fandom? If you like well done reviews, you'll love On The Market. As George is (or was) to Inside Comics, so is OTM to Graphic Visions. Randy Medoff has gathered together some of the best reviewers around and turned out his own zine within GV. He even did the typing and layouts on OTM (I must confess the Mercy illo on pg. 21 is my doing, I wanted to fit it into the issue and when I saw that space, seemingly made to order, I couldn't resist).

Special thanks are in order for three special dudes; Rick Williams, Bob Jessup, and Jim Main. Grim Jim filled me in on some of the more intricate parts of zine-editing (he's edited at least thirteen issues of various zines, that I know of) and sent me a batch of artwork, one piece of which is this issue's back cover. Bob Jessup (who has no idea he is asst. ed.; I can't wait to see his face when I hand him his copy of GV and he discovers he is the asst. ed.) asked friend Tom Artus to do the cover and Tom turned in a fine job (especially for his first brushwork; he normally inks with a pen). Bob also asked Marvel b&w artist Tim Conrad to ink a couple of Blackmark preliminary drawings I had; one each by Neal Adams and Gil Kane. Tim inked them both beautifully (the Adams one was fairly detailed, while the Kane one was very sketchy). The Adams one is in this issue, pg. 22 to be exact and the Kane one should be in next issue. And a very special thanks goes to Rick "keep on smilin'" Williams for allowing me to use his Dan Adkins Conan illustration as the centerspread. Rick also sent me some other artwork (by himself and others), two pieces of which are in the zine somewhere. Thanks much, guys. It couldn't have been done without ya....to coin a cliche.

We are always looking for new contributors, so anyone who might like to do something for submission, please do. A few bits of advice, though: 1) We can't print anything that utilizes'wash'[1]; if you want gray tones, please use zip-a-tone. 2) Possible full-pagers should be done 8½"x11" (with a ½" margin all around) while the best size for 'spot' illoes is 3½"x5". 3)It's best to get in touch with me first if you'd like to do a text feature. 4) If you want anything back, you'll have to send enough return postage, as GV has siphoned off most of my funds (which weren't much to begin with.)

From now on I plan to do one of these editorials only if I feel one is needed to explain something. After all, I'm sure you don't want to hear (read?) me ramble on and on and on.....every issue!

Next issue, if enough of you respond, there will be a letter column. Letters don't necessarily have to be about GV (though I do want to hear how you think I could make GV better) but can just discuss various happenings on the comic scene. Remember write... after all, "how can we go forward when we don't know which way we're facing?"[2] (Makes sense doesn't it?)

Chris 5-18-75

1... As an experiment, three illos in this ish have wash effects in them and are being sent to the printer as is to see how they come out. The gray may drop out or it may blur the illo. But I'll try anything once (or in this case, thrice). By the way, the

three illoes are the two Cirocco full-pagers and the Gary Phillips illo on the contents page. They're three of the best illos in zine in their original state. With a bit of luck, they'll turn out clear, though sans the 'wash'.

3...This is a slight rewording of the opening line of the song "How?"(John Lennon) from the Imagine album. The line as Lennon sang it goes, "How can I go forward when I don't know which way I'm facing?" While on the subject of music: for those of you who care about these things GV was layed out during many playings of Imagine, and Welcome to my Nightmare; and many, many playings of All Things Must Pass.

KNOCKS, BOOSTS, PLUGS, KNOCKS, BOOSTS, P

If the above name sounds familiar to you older fans, it's probably because this type of thing was a feature in the zine, Marvel Mirror, circa 1967-68.

Anyways, here's a few fine fanzines that deserve at least a try (after all,you make like 'em).

all the below are offset

Batmania #21, $1.00 from Rich Morrissey; 55 Claudette Circle; Framingham, Mass.; 01701.

This issue spotlights the famous World's Finest team, Superman and Batman. Also featured is a superb Batman pin-up/centerspread by the talented Arlen Schumer. Rich also has back issues for sale (#'s 19 and 20, I believe)at 50¢ each.

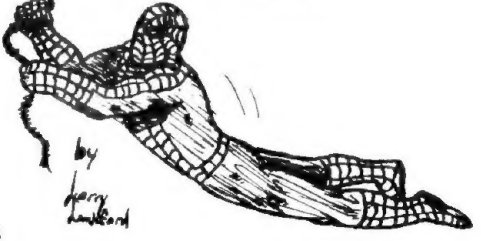
Fandom Funnies #1, 85¢ from Jay L. Zilber; 81 Webster Park; Columbus, Ohio; 43214.

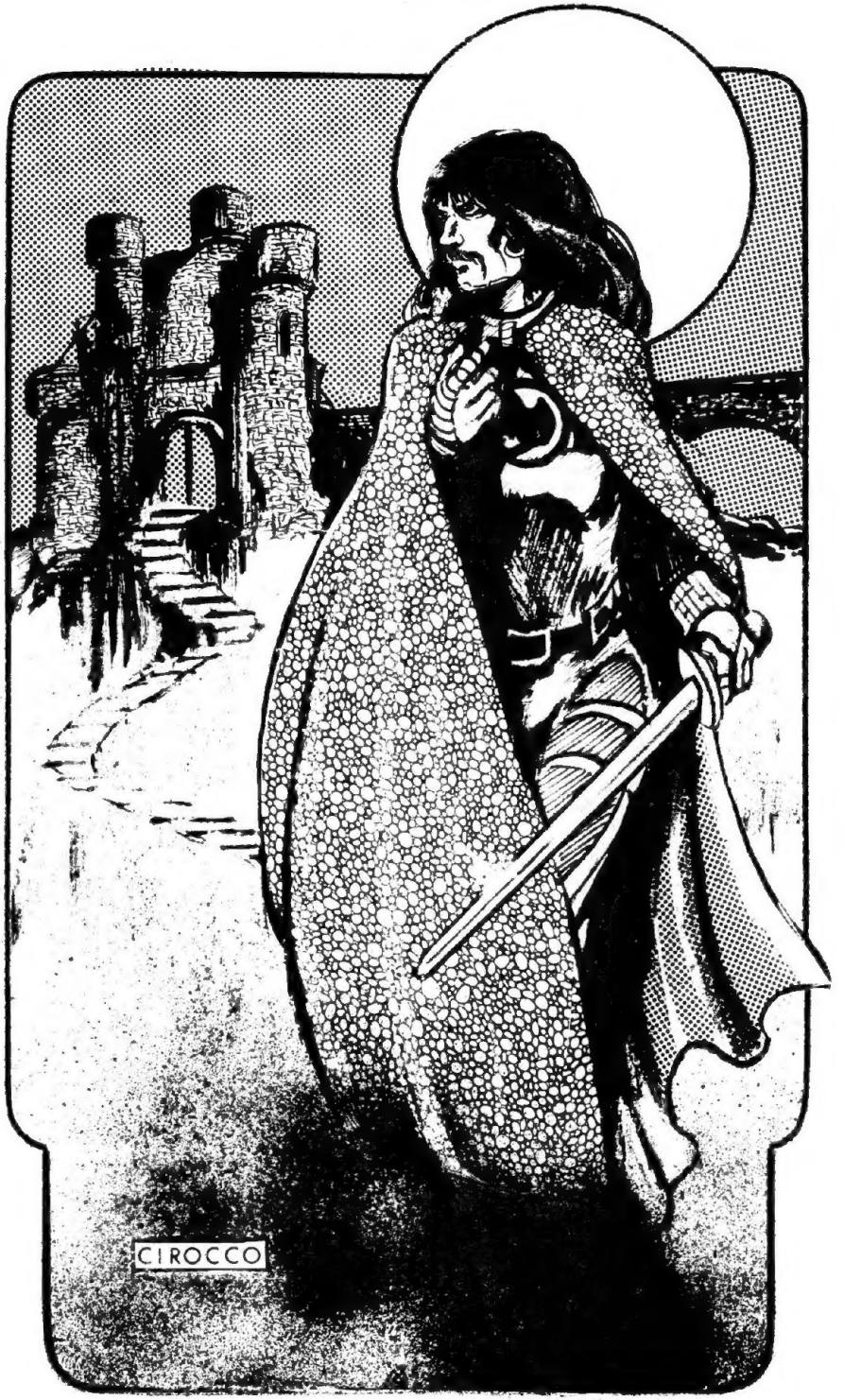
It's a Zilber-zine. For those of you familiar with Jay's writing that's all that needs to be said. FF is the NatLamp of fandom. #1 has a very well done TCR parody (featuring a Howard the Duck cover by none other than Frank Brunner) as well as parodies on Murray Boltinoff letters pages/Captain "Shazam" Marvel and fanzine editorials and others.

PPFSZT* #8, 50¢ from Jim Main; 18 Culvert City RD.; New Milford, Conn.; 06776.

Grim Jim comes through with another of his fine zine efforts. This issue features a study of the career of Adam Warlock, a 10 pg. strip by Brent Anderson, art by Frank Cirocco (including the cover) and an article on the live action/animation Sat. morning children's show "Land of the Lost". I hate the show but the article and accompanying index are well done.

That's all for now, maybe KBP will return next issue. Bye, bye.




CIROCCO

UPDATE

by Jay Zilber

I don't like barbarian books.

There! I admit it. I'm biased, and in the worst way. I have just given a blanket condemnation to a voluminous amount of work by some of the finest talents in the comics industry—Barry Smith, Roy Thomas, and John Buscema heading the list—without even considering some of their more positive aspects. There are certain concrete reasons why I look at Conan and his ilk with disdain...reasons such as their commercialization, formularization, and superproliferation.

But mostly, I just don't like barbarian books.

It's not a congenital prejudice. My scorn for these bloodthirsty brutes developed gradually, starting with CONAN #1. When the book first came out, I was barely a neo-fan at the time. I had never heard of Robert E. Howard. Who is this Barry Smith guy? I was hardly even interested in Marvel comics as a whole, my roots in fandom being those of a DC freak. I bought the book hesitantly, and regretted it. The art was nice, but who wants to read about this stupid mindless barbarian with the funny helmet with the horns? I buried my head in BATMAN, and sold my copy of CONAN #1 to a friend for 10¢.

We all make mistakes, folks. These things happen. But it didn't help me to become any more fond of barbarian books when I realized my mistake a couple of years later.

So I don't like barbarian books. But I don't hate them; what I do hate is badly-done barbarian books, the number of which has increased more than 100% in the last four months. Why? What makes these sword-slashing savages so popular?

I have no idea whatsoever. The only thing I do know about it is that when barbarians—or anything—is proven to be popular, it will immediately be mass-produced as cheaply as possible. Such is the way of the world.

I make no pretense at being able to analyse this genre objectively. It's against my nature. You may thouroughly agree with my opinions, or you may totally disagree with them. But this is UPDATE, reviewing that bunch of barbaric bores, that crop of Conan copies, the "creme de la Crom"...

THE CIMMERIAN ~~CONNECTION~~ COLLECTION

CLAW THE UNCONQUERED #1: "The World Trembles Before The Blade Of Claw The Unconquered"—née Talon the Untamed, until Jimmy Steranko stepped in to straighten out National's lawyers. Writer David Michelinie and artist Ernie Chua make no attempt to convince the reader that Claw is not really Conan. Which is just as well; Claw is Conan. With a gimmick, a deformed right hand. But it's still Conan. Different names, different faces, different places, different gods, different horrible monsters...and yet, they're all the same. Rarely has any comics company developed such a direct steal from another. But even more rarely is there no attempt to redress and redesign the concept to at least look original.

But one thing CLAW has, which CONAN more often than not lacks, is a sense of overall quality that tends to accompany those books from the editorial offices of Joe Orlando. CLAW is immediately tempting with a cover that one does not have to stare at for ten minutes before one can comprehend what is supposed to be going on. The plotline is unrestricted by previously written novels adapted in random order in three seperate books to wreak havoc with the continuity. Art is more than adequate, plot and dialogue are strong. Had CONAN never existed, CLAW would have been hailed as an incredible and overwhelmingly high-quality innovation. In fact, as Claw mirrors its successful Hyborean godfather so closely, it may well be National's first successful barbarian, following the failure of his more "arty" predecessors—Nightmaster, Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser, and Ironwolf. It's a sad tribute to the comics-buying public that original

sword and sorcery characters such as those cannot survive. But perhaps as CLAW is not bound by any predetermined life history, the book will gradually mutate into something of even more considerable merit. (Fat chance! Still, it's really impossible to judge a book by its first issue. Anything could happen...and comics history teaches us that in such cases, it probably will.)

* * * * *

BEOWULF #1: Denny O'Neil seems to have an unbroken track record of being editor of a number of "arty" comics that die after the first few issues. It would look like he's about to maintain that record.

BEOWULF will not stand out as one of his more superior accomplishments. Mike Uslan is a competent writer, but Ricardo Villamonte's art is stiff and does not flow with the story. The entire book reeks of ambitious intentions that never go past being intentions.

But even more sadly, BEOWULF has nothing to do with the epic poem of the same name. The "real" Beowulf wasn't a barbarian. He was a prince who lived, if at all, in historical times (515 AD or thereabouts). BEOWULF is almost guaranteed to have a relatively brief life in the comics--what a shame they couldn't at least do it right. If only Denny could have forgotten there was such a character as Conan, or such a company as Marvel, his accomplishments on this book would have at least been respectable from a critical perspective. (It certainly doesn't help matters any that we have a colorist who has arbitrarily decided that the female underarm is obscene, and has painted little green bra straps onto Nan-Zee, which looks ludicrous at best.)

* * * * *

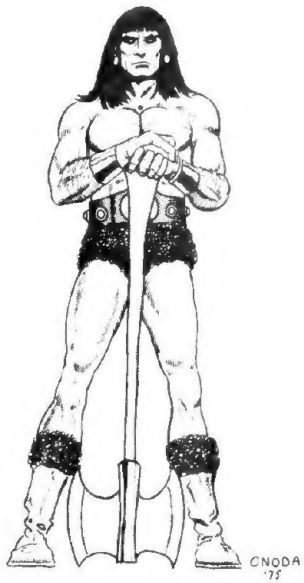
WULF THE BARBARIAN #3: Don't let the title throw you. Wulf is no barbarian, and it astounds me no end that Seaboard has the unmitigated gall to call him one. My decision to include it in this column was almost arbitrary.

When the first few comics of the Seaboard line first appeared, WULF was actually one of the very few bright spots in spite of its misnomer; Larry Hama's scripts were fun to read, and his art was pleasant to look at. Hama left the strip, and substitute editor Larry Lieber assigned Leo Summers, whose script plods along at an unbearably slow pace, and whose art is painfully unsuited for this strip. This story is even further removed from sword and sorcery; dealing with an enormous iron-smelting plant, it was more on the order of sword & technology. Already, WULF has slipped into a dull rut--each issue he gets himself picked up by a new cast of supporting characters, slashes up a few unfortunates, and takes off in search of revenge again; revenge which he will almost certainly never find. A well-educated prince with a sword and a plot formula doth not a barbarian make...

WULF is indicative of the entire Seaboard comics set. We expected new and refreshing ideas and got nothing but old and rehashed ones. The few books which offered anything in the way of quality rapidly lost it. There's still a slim chance that WULF will someday be a decent top-notch barbarian book. But at this point, it's just not worth hoping for. Seaboard's books are dying left and right--many people speculate that the company will be dead by the end of the year--if we lose a barbarian book that has nothing to do with a barbarian, 'tis a small loss indeed.

* * * * *

IRONJAW #3: On the other hand, here we have one character who is far and away the most stupid, mindless (read "lacking in social skills") barbarians ever created.



Coincidentally enough, his strip is one of the most stupid, mindless (read "stupid, mindless") comics ever created.

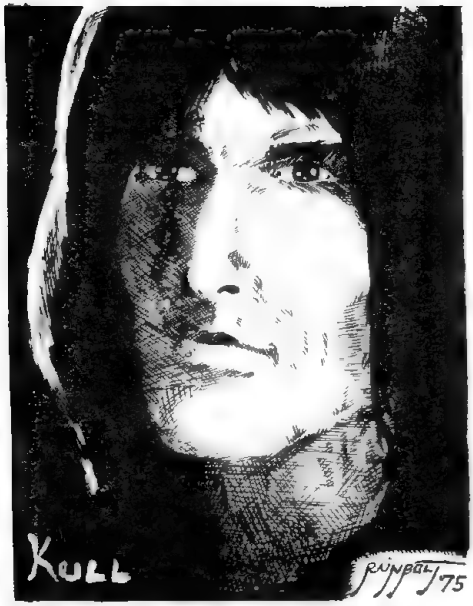
Don't misunderstand, now. IRONJAW is pretty good stuff. There's nothing wrong with having a stupid, mindless strip, so long as it is written and drawn well. In fact, IJ is easily the only Seaboard book that has improved with age (remember that first abysmal issue drawn by Mike Sekowsky). But the present artist, Pablo Marcos, is an incredible talent, and IJ is perhaps one of the only two or three books that Mike Fleisher (fondly known as "Mike the Knife") has ever written that his techniques are well-suited for. Followers of Mike's work know that he has a rather bizarre tendency to kill a large amount of innocent bystanders and supporting characters in everything he writes....what better place for such a stupid, mindless style than a stupid mindless book about a stupid mindless bloodthirsty barbarian?

And Ironjaw is the barbarian's barbarian. He and his buddy Tar-lok jeopardize each other's life, all in fun. Ironjaw would never stand for one of Conan's ankle-grabbing wenches who get in the way; he's such an impolite bastard, he would lop off her head the moment she made more trouble than she was worth. And wimmen are worth precious little to the man with the metal mandible--no apologies to Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem.

IRONJAW is one of the few bright stars in the Atlas horizon...

* * * * *

THE BARBARIANS #1: ...but it seems to be growing dimmer. Few would deny that



the decline in the quality of the CONAN monthly book was due to overexposure, which brought on a severe state of prevailing formula over originality. Now Seaboard has decided to milk Ironjaw and his barbarian buddies for whatever they can. IJ stars here in a ten-page tale by Gary Friedrich, who obviously meant well, but often violated the characterization that Fliesher had developed. "The Mountain of Mutants" was dull, underdeveloped Conanesque tripe, ostensibly occuring sometime in the future of the present storyline in the regular IRONJAW book.

TB #1 also introduces Andrax, a reasonably original concept as barbarians go--Michael Rush falls asleep for 2000 years, and awakens to a world of savage terror (not so terribly unlike KAMANDI, though)--adequately written by Steve Skeates (so I'm told) and drawn by Crom-knows-who. It certainly has possibilities...but then, so does <u>everything</u>, and for the most part, those possibilities are rarely realized to the fullest. Fandom needs this book like they need another Archie book. They don't.

* * * * *

DAGAR THE INVINCIBLE #12: That fourth banana of the comics world, that unparalleled master of formulization, Gold Key, has one o' dem s&s books that qualifies as a barbarian book too. But like nearly everything Gold Key publishes, the art is superfluous; between the dialogue and the captions, the story was told quite completely, sounding not unlike an old radio drama. The pictures were un-necessary, and often got in the way. Perhaps it would be better off without art entirely, as Jesse Santos' unrefined sketchy ink splats bear little resemblance to comic art. Plotwise, we've seen it all before...and if you haven't, the captions constantly recap Dagar's origin for your benefit ("...and though Durak no longer battles, Dagar does not relent--lashing out as the warrior Ando had trained him during those years following the destruction of his nation, Tulgonia...") right in the middle of a fight sequence.

Having survived twelve issues, it would appear that DAGAR is a relatively successful book in spite of its appalling lack of quality. It makes one wonder if the hoardes of Dagar fans buy the book because Dagar's intellect is superior to theirs.

* * * * *

And here's what it all comes down to...CONAN THE BARBARIAN #52: What can I say?

Conan has gone through some rather weak periods recently, but I think he's

starting to move up again. "Our brawny barbarian continues his life as a mercenary soldier, a career begun during...issues #19-38" says Roy the Boy on the letter page. If #52 is any indication, it looks like our brawny barbarian is also going to acquire some degree of plot direction, a welcome change from the plotless repetitiveness of issues #39-51. And now that Tom Palmer is inking John Buscema's pencils, Conan's art is truely beautiful for the first time in many a month. With the Giant-size quarterly CONAN book discontinued, the monthly should improve further, as there will be fewer continuity disruptions. One would hope that with fewer plots and scripts to be written, Roy will see fit to be a bit more creative and lavish a bit more tender loving care on the remaining plots and scripts. Travesties like reprint issues or last-minute Red Sonja backups had better be a permanant thing of the past.

What makes barbarians so popular? The fans do! But it really isn't the concept of the barbarian itself that sells; otherwise, the KULL color book and Thongor and Fafhrd and Ironwolf would still be going strong. Fandom <u>en masse</u> has definite preferences: barbarians who are too esoteric or too contrived or baly written, drawn, or edited fall by the wayside. Some "good" books may die--but "good" is a relative term in a discussion of "quality" by thousands and thousands of comics fans, no two of whom can entirely agree as to what constitutes "good" comics. In a sense, it's reassuring to see barbarian books cancelled once in awhile...if none ever were, it would mean that fandom is blindly buying and reading such books without regard to their quality, and it's gratifying to know that we have <u>some</u> degree of discriminating taste.

After all, what are we? Barbarians?

//////END//////

ATLAS; The New Comic Book Titan That's 'Holding up' The Fans....Literally!

By Mike "Buy Anything" Bobbo

While shuffling through the dealers room at the Famous Monsters Convention last November, I noticed a dealer from Hartford selling the "new" comics I had been hearing about from my better-informed fan friends. It seems that Martin Goodman decided to re-enter the comics field and had started a new line of books under the Atlas name that he had used in the early fifties.

So I bought two of the three he had on sale...PHOENIX and IRONJAW, and that night while the Creature was trying to abduct Julie Adams, I went up to my hotel room and read them. Looking back on things I wish I had stuck around to see if the Creature had abducted Ms. Adams. IRONJAW was a disappointment and PHOENIX, while interesting, had some tasteless overtones.

Despite my mixed feelings I've since bought nearly every Atlas comic that's been released in order to see what, as a company, they're trying to do. If you've read Steranko's MEDIASCENE you would have assumed that Atlas, by giving their people more money and greater creative control, would become the Marvel of the 70's, blazing new trails for comic fiction and becoming a strong third name in comics. However, if you read the Atlas comics, you'll see that there is one thing that Atlas is concerned with.....and that's selling comics.

The Atlas line of comics could have been conceived by a computer or a group of market analysists. Nearly everything in the Atlas line is a proven seller, swiped from the other comics companies or from other media. Don't believe me? Let's take a look....

Atlas ahs three sword and sorcery titles: IRONJAW, WULF, and THE BARBARIANS. IRONJAW is a very Conan-ish type book which after a horrible start(Mike Sekowsky artwork) is at least getting readable. However the plot-lines of the noble savage becoming more and more civilized and the fact that he's really a rightful ruler of a country, are just a bit too trite to distinguish him. WULF is better as it has a very Fritz Lieber-ish feel to the scripts and these added elements of humor, and atmosphere help the book a great deal. WULF is one of Atlas' best books and I would recommend it. THE BARBARIANS is an anthology book with a main story featuring WULF or IRONJAW and a back-up feature, ANDRAX. If the editors live up to their word this could be a very good book.

THE DESTRUCTOR is teenager, Jay Hunter; a young man whose scientist father is killed a gangster but not before he can give his punk son a serum that can give him super-strength and heightened senses. Jay goes on a revenge spree and vows to fight crime. Drawn by Ditko and Wood, written by Archie Goodwin; THE DESTRUCTOR is a logical extension of Spider-man/Peter Parker. Though Jay Hunter is a little hoodier (?-ED.) and more self-pitying and nothing more. Forget this one.

The GRIM GHOST, the spirit of Matthew Dunsinane, who destroys crime on Earth in order to send the souls of the criminals to Satan. One issue of this book will convince you that the Grim Ghost is no more than a negative Spectre. A complete steal even down to the "how-can-a-ghost-love" shtick.

However Atlas is more than willing to steal from other media than the comics. THE BRUTE is a nearly scene-by-scene steal (or in polite terms- an uncredited adaptation) of the 1972 Joan Crawford film TROG. PLANET OF THE VAMPIRES takes its name from the 1965 Mario Bava film and its plot from OMEGA MAN and numerous other SF flicks.

Perhaps Atlas' most disturbing steal is the PHOENIX, for this book has the New Testament as its "inspiration". Astronaut Ed Tyler discovers that the Earth is merely an experiment for the Deiei (a la CHARIOTS OF

THE GODS). The Deiei, of course, try to destroy Tyler, who dons an atomic powered zoot suit and becomes an instant super-hero. Defeating the Deiei temporarily, Tyler decides that he has risen out of the ashes to become mankind's protector, the Phoenix. In later issues he battles the devil (really just a disguised Deiei) who nearly crucifies him, parts a sea, and flies into the sun with his arms outright, saying,"All people need an example—a man to lead them away from evil—to show them the path to salvation! As did I, so will man rise from the ashes of hatred and prejudice!" By this time the sun is behind him for a nice halo effect. Ed Tyler could be a good super-hero, but is a lousy messiah.

Sensing the trend toward violence and revenge in the current crop of television programs and films, Atlas has several titles that appeal to this type of mindless action. TIGER-MAN is Dr. Lancaster Hill who injected himself with tiger juices and discovered he had the power of that animal (Spider-man and The Whizzer have similar origins). The murder of his sister leads him to use his powers to wipe out crime, which is the same attitude that motivated Charles Bronson in DEATHWISH. The killing of his family by the mob also leads John Targitt to go on a violence binge in TARGITT, THE MANSTALKER. LOMAX, N.Y.P.D. is KOJAK with hair and just as exciting.

Atlas also has its plant "heroes", BOG BEAST and MORLOCK 2001, and its bread and butter books like WESTERN ADVENTURES, SAVAGE COMBAT TALES, TALES OF EVIL, and VICKI. At this point one can see that instead of concentrating on one or two good titles (like Marvel did in the early 60's), Atlas has decided to publish a whole line of 21 books. Clearly the strain of starting 21 new books, establishing the characters, building sales and ironing out problems shows. In my eyes, WULF is their one solid book now that Howie Chaykin's unique SCORPION book has been cancelled. THE SCORPION is an example of the Atlas attitude...Chaykin's unusual "hero", a true soldier-of-fortune who would do anything for the right price, was written and illustrated in the dramatic Chaykin style hinted at in the short-lived Fafhrd and Grey Mouser series for DC. Atlas has taken the series and up-dated it and has taken Chaykin off of the book and put two of the worst hacks I have ever seen on it, Jim Craig and Gabriel Levy. It's now a conventional and possibly less controversial

bread and butter book. A triumph for the Atlas business managers I'm sure.

If Atlas is the new titan of the industy, then they're making titans a lot smaller these days.

DAN ADKINS

·ON THE MARKET·

Reviewers are Randy Medoff (RM), Robert Trombetta (RT), David McDonnell (DM), and Bill Blyberg, Jr. (BB) and are initialled as such. Publishers who would like to see their publications reviewed in "On the Market" should send them to Randy Medoff, c/o "On the Market" at: 56 Spencer Ct., Hartsdale, N.Y. 10530

FORUM AND THE PHANTASY REVIEW #5 75¢ from Aranef Enterprises, 2704 South Garfield Ave., Sioux Falls, South Dakota 57105 / Offset, wraparound, 24 pages, 7 x 8½

Although PHR improves with each issue and has a good overall concept (reviews of many current fandom products, along with letters and some general articles) it still suffers from bad layout and generally shoddy appearance.

Most of the features in this issue--an article on Marvel's "Worlds Unknown," a Spirit parody, a column by David Fryxell and an unusual crossword puzzle--are superficial and uninteresting. An article on Don Newton is more successful, because it manages to give the reader some insight into the subject--and the subject is more interesting than those of the other articles.

The high point of the issue is the zine review column, "Forum." The reviews are well-written, comprehensive, perceptive and a pleasure to read. This part of the zine should probably be expanded in future issues.

If, in the future, the rest of the zine attains the quality of the review column, it'll be one of fandom's most interesting small publications. Until then, the dismal art and poor appearance are drawbacks heavy enough to drag the zine down to a sub-par level.

/RT

WYRD #4 - 75¢ from Wyrd Publications, c/o Brian Crist, 324 Candy Lane, Santa Rosa, Ca. 95401 Offset, wraparound, 44 pages, 7 x 8½

This is the first Wyrd put together by new editor Brian Crist and assistant editor Greg Stafford, and the pair have done a splendid job. Wyrd #4 is well layed out, flawlessly typed, and contains a round of outstanding fan fiction. An excellent sf piece by Darrell Schweitzer, "Never Argue With Antique Dealers" leads off, followed by C.L.Ballentine's clever "Hotline" and an interesting, albeit unfinished, s&s tale, "The Funeral of Thamayris the Warlock" by David Madison. The issue's artwork is (with the exception of a superior cover piece) not particularly good, but illustrations are rather infrequent here.

Without question, Wyrd #4 is deserving of your money.

/RM

THE BURROWERS BENEATH by Brian Lumley, DAW Books, 95¢, 160 pages

Little did H.P.Lovecraft suspect, when he toiled cheaply revising other writers' lackluster fiction forty years ago, that he would achieve any lasting prominence in the field of writing. Now, in 1975, every fan of the supernatural has heard of him. Authors from Ray Bradbury to Colin Wilson have paid homage to him. His books are in print and selling briskly.

And whenever the name "Lovecraft" is mentioned, that whis-

pered word, "Cthulhu," is not far behind. Lovecraft created a mini-industry, the Cthulhu Mythos, which survived his death maintained over the years by a growing legion of authors who have added a mountain of lore to it. A recent addition of note is Brian Lumley.

Lumley first appeared in the Mythos with two stories, "Cement Surroundings" and "The Sister City" in the Arkham House collection, TALES OF THE CTHULHU MYTHOS. In THE BURROWERS BENEATH, Lumley has expanded the theme presented in "Cement Surroundings" (which is also included as one of the book's chapters). It details the struggle of Titus Crow and Henri-Laurent De Marigny against the Spawn of Shudde M'ell, worm-like creatures which tunnel through the earth. (The title of the books is pure Lovecraft--coming from "The Burrower Beneath," one of those stories "Robert Blake" supposedly wrote in Lovecraft's "The Haunter of the Dark") Crow and De Marigny are enlisted in a world-wide witch hunt by Wingate Peaslee of Miskatonic University in which the worms are systematically located by telepathy, imprisoned with star stones and spells, and destroyed by electronic harpoon bombs. For once, man triumphs over Cthulhu-like Great Old Ones' minions...if only for a little while.

THE BURROWERS BENEATH is a worthy, entertaining addition to the Mythos. It breaks new ground in an exciting manner. Get it!

/DM

FANTASY CROSSROADS #1 - $2.00 from Jonathan Bacon, Box 1274, Graceland College, Lamoni, Iowa 50140 / Offset, side-stapled, 90 pages, 8½ x 11

This is the first issue of a new zine intended, the editor says, "to be the crossroads where the various sections of fantasy fandom gather to exchange their best works and criticize their worst." It's a noble aim, but is unfortunately not carried out in FC #1.

Rather than a unified whole, the zine has the appearance of being haphazardly thrown together. Tossed together in a large jumble are features on grading comics (yawn), movie stills, amateur artwork (some good, some horrendous), a long message from the ubiquitous Stan Blair, an overlong review column, interviews with Jack Kirby and Will Eisner, etc.,etc. The best of these is the talk with Eisner--more comprehensive and thought-provoking than many other fandom interviews I've read.

There's also a long Robert E. Howard section consisting of reprinted poems, a synopsis and a below average short story. The poetry is nice, though it would have benefitted from better presentation, but the rest is wasted space.

And that's the main problem with the zine--for all its bulk and pretensions to a "crossroads for fantasy fandom," a disproportionate amount of material is mere filler, and tiresome stuff at that. They have a long way to go before the zine is worth the $2.00 price tag. A paring down of size and ambition might be in order.

/RT

THE NOSTALGIA JOURNAL #8 - Free from P.O.Box 242, Lewisville, Tex. 75067 / Offset, 52 pages, tabloid

Much to everyone's surprise, The Nostalgia Journal has suddenly bloomed into some bonafide competition for The Buyers Guide. Boasting a circulation of 7000 (equal to TBG's) and advertising rates considerably less expensive than the Guide's, TNJ has increased its page count steadily since the first issue; #8 is 52 pages thick, two sections, and well layed out.

And, best of all, it's free.... an offer which is hard to pass up.

/RM

THE LEGION OUTPOST #8 - $1.00 from Mike Flynn, 1354 Herschell St., Bronx, NY 10461 / Offset, wrapa-round, 36 pages, 8½ x 11

Here we have one of the best buys in all fandom. Outpost #8 features front and back covers by Dave Cockrum, and both are well-drawn although the inking of the front is superior. Interior art is highlighted by a lot of material by C.C.Beck, and a few spot illoes of higher than average quality.

This issue is distinguished by two great interviews: one with Jim Shooter, comics' boy wonder, the other with the late Otto Binder. Both are a bit outdated now, but provide interesting reading.

There are also a few columns by the zine's regular contributors. They give a variety of personal opinions and comments on specific books and situations--mostly relating to the Legion of Superheroes, of course. One column rambles on about a get-together at the DC offices with all the people producing the zine and all the people producing their favorite comic. Usually this kind of stuff is just plain dumb, but one thing it does show is that DC is not all-business, as they advertise themselves to be.

Finally, there are a few photos and a typically vindictive little bunch of 'anecdotes' by C.C.Beck, who should stick to drawing. The zine is accompanied by two Legion Outpost Bulletins--one with news, reviews, and some classifieds, the other announcing the return of Jim Shooter to the comics' pro scripting scene, a welcome note for all Legion fans.

/BB

WORD BALLOONS #1 - $1.00 from Gary Groth, 7263 Evanston Rd., Springfield, Va. 22150 / Offset, wrapa-round, 32 pages, 8½ x 11

Word Balloons is a fairly recent fanzine produced by Gary Groth, who for several years was the editor of Fantastic Fanzine. For all its faults (and there were many), FF had about it a pleasant aura of enthusiasm and casualness sorely missing from Word Balloons. Whereas FF was content to be a simple, fannish zine, WB pretentiously subtitles itself "the magazine of the comic arts." A zine with that sort of subtitle has something to live up to; WB is not capable of doing so.

A quick scan of the contents would be a wise move. The main feature of the issue is an interview with Neal Adams (another interview with Neal Adams?) which is reasonably interesting, though almost solely devoted to the subject of graphic story-telling. The main body of the remainder of the zine consists of speech and panel transcripts from various Metro Cons. This is where my cheif complaint with the zine lies. When a great deal of a zine consists of old speech transcripts, one can only feel that the editor hasn't done his job in obtaining the kind of original, thought-provoking material that something which bills itself as "the magazine of the comic arts" should be printing. It is annoyingly incongruous to read, in a magazine that the editor says "will concern itself with what's happening in comic books," a speech transcript in which Denny O'Neil quotes from his latest "Green Lantern/Green Arrow" story.

Basically, Word Balloons stumbles in its attempts at intellectual posturing. When a zine tries the intellectual approach and succeeds, it can be a rewarding, fulfilling reading experience. When it fails, it becomes dull, tedious, and, in the case of Word Balloons, a bit of a con.

/RT

WHISPERS #5 - $1.75 from Stuart David Schiff, 5508 Dodge Drive, Fayetteville, NC 28803 / Offset, wraparound, 68 pages plus advertising supplements, 5½ x 8½

Whispers is one of the classiest and most professional of the weird fiction/fantasy zines. It's a beautiful production--the printing is excellent and the pages of type are occasionally relieved by some superb illustrations (especially a portfolio by Steve Fabian and the back cover by Richart Olsen).

It's also filled with good reading--an informative, comprehensive news section; an impressive article on Lovecraft's "The White Ship" by Dirk W. Mosig in which the author ties Lovecraft in with C.G.Jung and his theory of collective and personal unconscious; and four pieces of above-average fiction (the best being "Reply Guaranteed" by Ramsey Campbell). A minor fault in the issue is a superficial article on Lovecraft himself, which never really justifies its presence in the zine.

One of the most impressive things about Whispers is its cohesive integration of the fiction and nonfiction--nothing really seems out of place and all the material is intelligent and well-written, as opposed to all too many current zines. The price is a little steep, but it should definitely be sampled.

/RT

CONTEMPORARY PICTORIAL LITERATURE #11 - 60¢ from CPL/Gang Publications, 4010 Hallway Dr., Apt. A., Indianapolis, Ind. 46236 / Offset, wraparound, 36 pages, 5½ x 8½

For the real comic book aficionado, there's CPL..a package of somewhat interesting, although often tedious, articles that should appeal to most comic mavens. A piece on Galactus by John Byrne, "Does the Vison Have Blood?" by Paty Greer, and a rather insipid column by Steve Gerber fairly well examplify this issue as far as text goes. The art is slick-looking, big-name material (quite good, also, for the most part) all the way through. Byrne contributes a six-page strip, "The Coming of the Gang," but it's hampered by an overabundance of inside jokes.

If you're into the comic book scene, you'll enjoy CPL; at 60¢, it's not a bad buy..but certainly not a good one. Your move.

/RM

COMIC ART NEWS AND REVIEWS #24 20¢ from John Balge, 28 Admiral Rd., Kitchener, Ontario, Canada Offset, wraparound, 8 pages, 8½ x 11

CANAR is an eight-page zine which starts off with a nicely-constructed, but hurriedly-inked cover by Gene Day. Inside, a two-page interview with Andy Capp creator and artist Reg Smythe. I was bored with this, and usually interviews are my favorite parts of fanzines. Then, in 3½ pages, there's a good run-down on a seldom-discussed area of pro domics--Gold Key's humor titles. Carl Barks, and Walt Kelly, among other greats of the past, have been written about before; this focuses on the new material. Not much of interest or high-quality is being produced; it's a well-written piece, but who cares, really?

That's it--for 20¢, how can you go wrong, I suppose. Still, with only a couple of articles, concerning topics of little general interest, you might be better off holding onto the change.

/RM

NA/TAC

SPACE FILLERS

by
Rod Snyder

COMMERCIALISM IN TODAY'S COMIC FANZINES

Yes, I've gotten to this rag, too, people. I'm sure many, perhaps most, of you have not seen or read any of my writings or illustrations, so don't consider yourself too bad off. Let me aquaint you un-enlightened ones with SF: I'm trying, through this column(which appears periodically in various other fan products) to share some thoughts on the state of prodom and fandom today and how if-there's-a-hell-below-we'll-all-go. Yeah, the usual stuff. As if you <u>needed</u> it down your throats any further. But the faneds think so, and I shan't look a gift Orc in the mouth.

Anyway, I think it's an interesting thing to notice trends in fanzines through the years, not only in content, but in style, layout, and printing. It would seem

that fanzines are affected by the state of the economy and the "top of the heap" bunch, for instance, as, say, popular clothing fashions--to pick a totally different-sounding world.

But one cannot cite any totally definate rules for thought, as the fantasist (and I'm talking about you and me) always seems to be too much of an individualist to totally belong to any one crowd or flock of human sheep, and there always seems to be someway to at least partially escape the ravages of inflation and depression enough to satisfy your appetite for enterprise.

In fandom's beginning, we had the ditto-ed and mimeographed Science Fiction fanzines which were followed by scores of others devoted to everything from Bradbury to Box Top offers. However the subject matter differed, they all had their fannish flavor in common, and usually their cheap mode of printing. Fans had not yet stumbled across the concept of making their amatuer publications a part-time career, or even

pulling in any substantial amount of green. If you planned to publish anything of the sort you had to expect losses as a matter of course. After all just about any hobby is going to cost money.

Many attempts at making money doing this met with quick failure, until fandom in general was large enough to enable someone to come along with the right idea for a fancy, no expenses-barred extravaganza that would give us gullible souls something we'd never had a shot at before--and for us to bite at it en masse until both parties came out of the encounter with "satisfaction guaranteed" written across our faces. We'd cherish the artsy illustrations and reproduction as the ultimate in achievement and creativity.

Reprints geared towards a fan audience have been with us longer than most would realize, out of these grew the arty reprint-zines with snob-appeal, something that that the now-prospering "prozines" were offering, too. All of these are in wealthy abundance today, like most popular trends and marketed items, it only took a few people with capital and foresight to get the ball rolling. Soon, like a big fashion designer's fair, the forces of reputation-hungry faneds followed suit, buying their art and articles instead of accepting them from fan artists and writers. Everyone wanted a buck out of their hobby, and now they knew how to get it, and more where it came from. The key was to commercialize like a small-time rock group suddenly finding itself in the Eden-like garden of success and fame. Anyone's natural reaction is to please the people even more; give 'em what they want and they'll give you what you want in return. What happens when it comes to this in the fanzine world is simple: Mr. Slickzine ED decides to add on all the pro work possible, jack prices up for the effort, and just wait for more green to roll in so that he can go four-color next issue.

This spirals up and out of the fan world(and hopelessly into the pro world; there is nothing within that fans can identify with--and identification is one of the key elements in a fanzine's success in the first place--nor can they afford, as a majority, the sky-high price tag) in little time at all, and instead of doing otherwise with their valuable time, other faneds decide to do likewise and follow suit. Right now, all factors considered, fandom may be reaching a saturation point soon, and with

the present economic situation beginning to eat away at fandom's prosperity like it is, I'm just waiting for this speculator's game to collapse.

But perhaps I'm just shooting at bad apples, after all. Of course, there's the good in these professional efforts I so persistently condemn. I mean, it's certainly not a bad thing that pros or semi-pros can have other non-censored forums for their work where it's at least worthwhile, if not self-satisfying, to have their efforts appear.

And after all, there's no telling how many struggling fans were helped into pro careers as a result of their being published in reknowned and respected prozines or slickzines. Aren't those talented young artists and writers that were showcased in the latest issue of Phase the international all-stars of tomorrow? The pacemakers of fantasy in the world to come in only a short while? Aren't some already?

How about Russ Cochran, who, through a few expensive experiments, has proven that fandom can support any competant person who presents the treasures of comicdom's illustrious past in a way that will demonstrate exactly why they were treasures? As far as I can tell, he wasn't exactly rolling in money then, and may not be now. The success he has found, however, is the success he has deserved, and perhaps too small an amount.

Whether reprints, pro, or fan material, today's fan-oriented publications all serve a purpose; some experimenters like Russ Cochran deserve credit for the new dimensions they have brought fandom over the years, and others, like jump-on-the-bandwagon price guide publishers, are even worthy of merit for their alternative presentations to thousands of not always pleased enthusiasts, and showing what they think in spite of criticism.

What we must accept along with the attitudes present today in the ever-growing realm of comics fandom are the many trends and rampant methods of commercialization that will be with us now until fandom's end (heaven forbid!), the good along with the inevitable bad, in dangerously varying degrees. I think we'd all be smart to observe fandom's past virtues and mistakes, something I hope to do in greater depth soon, and judge for ourselves and for the good of fandom what we as a congregation of thousands can live with.

NEXT(possibly): Commercialism and Anti-commercialism in SF, WF, and other fandoms.

ROD SNYDER
3600 Ripple Creek Rd.
Austin, TX.
78746

The SPECTRE
© DAVE SIM

Reflections on the PHANTOM STRANGER

by Rich Morrissey

The recent revival by DC of the old SHOWCASE idea in FIRST ISSUE SPECIAL has led many fans to remark, "But of course! Why did they ever drop SHOWCASE in the first place?" These people overlook the fact that really successful new features, at DC in particular, are rare indeed—and significantly, of all the characters featured in SHOWCASE, only two recieved magazines of their own which they still possess at this writing. And at that, both of them were revivals in at least one sense: the first was the updated version of THE FLASH in #4, and the second was THE PHANTOM STRANGER.

The Phantom Stranger had actually been introduced in his own magazine in 1952, being featured in short 6-page stories together with science fiction fillers. As originally concieved by writer John Broome, artist Carmine Infantino and editor Julius Schwartz—ironically, the same people who were to launch the new FLASH to stardom four years later—he was a mysterious figure who appeared to help people faced with supernatural adversaries. The explanations invariably proved to be entirely material, with no hint of the supernatural—with the exception of the Phantom Stranger himself, who would vanish as quickly as he appeared.

The character was not unlike Agatha Christie's Harley Quin in concept, but Broome didn't have Mrs. Christie's genius in that particular direction. The formula's pleasing irony wore off with overuse, and became constricting—but nobody thought or cared to change it, so after six issues the magazine vanished as quickly as the character whose name it bore.

But fifteen years later, in 1968, editor Joe Orlando and writer Mike Friedrich decided that the character might be worth another go. To give the readers more for their money, they also dredged up another DC character from around the same period—Dr. Terry Thirteen, The Ghost-Breaker. Dr. Thirteen was a supernatural investigator who refused to acknowledge the existence of supernatural events; he and his fiancee Marie had roamed the pages of STAR-SPANGLED COMICS in its final days, always proving his beliefs right. Here, Friedrich and Orlando thought, was the perfect character to play against the Phantom Stranger...

So in SHOWCASE #80, a new formula was developed that was even more constricting than the old one. An apparently supernatural event would occur; the Phantom Stranger would appear and relate one of his past adventures (which might seem slightly out of character for a mysterious, enigmatic figure, but no matter—it gave Friedrich and Orlando a chance to use a reprint from the old PS series). Then Dr. Thirteen, now legally married to Marie, would relate one of his old adventures (another reprint—but at least more in character) and finally both would expose the fraud as in days of yore. Even though the Stranger, as might be expected, drove Thirteen up the wall, it must have pleasantly nostalgic for both of them.

The supernatural was in vogue, and reprints are cheap, so not surprisingly the Phantom Stranger got his own book again—and the formula continued. But the book was noteworthy to me in one particularly personal way—it printed my second letter (actually my first if you ignore a boo-boo letter that appeared in ACTION) in #4 (Nov.-Dec. 1969)and, at the risk of boring you, I'm going to quote it exactly as it appeared (in slightly edited form):

> Dear Editor:
>
> The trouble with DC's policy of rushing each successful SHOWCASE feature is that many features are only good for a few issues. Also, something that is original once may be boring more than once. Such is the case with the PHANTOM STRANGER. I think this feature holds possibilities, but there are three serious flaws in it. The first is the plots. Something apparently supernatural happens: the PHANTOM

STRANGER and Dr. Thirteen show up and prove it to be a fake. This has been done to death.

Also, Dr. Thirteen is a good character, but it's nonsensical for him to bump into the PHANTOM STRANGER every two months. Devote the magazine to the PHANTOM STRANGER and let Dr. Thirteen guest-star once a year or so.

One more thing. Have a letter column in every issue. I realize that you have to put the ads in, but you don't have to put in those "Fact Files". They're fine in addition to a letter column, but not instead of one. If you follow my suggestions, the PHANTOM STRANGER has a good chance of success, but if you don't, he will probably die a quick and unmourned death.

Perhaps too flat and unqualified a statement at the end, but getting ahead of myself for a moment, Joe Orlando did eventually follow every one of my suggestions! His answer to me was prophetic:

> We happen to disagree with you, Richard, and so do a lot of fans who like the format of the PHANTOM STRANGER, as is. We did try a different approach for this issue and we hope you like it better...We think that writer Bob Kanigher, and artists Bill Draut and Neal Adams did a great job.

A great job? Maybe not by my standards, or the standards of later issues, but I did like it better. The story in this issue was a full 23 pages, contained no reprints (though one not involving the Stranger or Thirteen appeared in addition to the main story) and, for once, included a genuine supernatural villainess—Tala, a Haitian goddess unwittingly released from the whirlpool that had held her captive by Dr. Thirteen, who had ironically hoped to prove her nonexistence by doing so.

And the greatest artist in comics, even though only inking Bill Draut (hitherto the solo artist on the new segments of the PS stories) greatly added to the appeal of Kanigher's above-average script. But some things got worse before they got better, as not only Dr. Thirteen but Tala and four teenagers who appeared in this issue became regular characters—appearing in every issue! A cast of eight (counting Mrs. Thirteen—whose name was now given as Maria, but after all Marie could have been

a dimunitive) was rather unwieldy—but worse, with the increasing use of supernatural menaces Dr. Thirteen began to appear more and more of a fool. A terrible injustice, as he had done nothing more than hold fast to a philosophy with which, in real life, I fully agree!

The next issue worthy of note was #7, in which Jim Aparo took over as artist on another Kanigher story. After Draut and Mike Sekowsky, Aparo was the best artist the magazine had yet seen, and added genuine atmosphere to a rather uninspired script. In one story told by the Phantom Stranger (both he and Thirteen still recounted many of their past cases as stories-within-a-story, but now at least they were all new) he told of a sea siren who bore an uncanny resemblance to Tala—but as Tala had only been freed from the whirlpool half a year before, and this story had taken place "years ago", it must have been pure coincidence.

The following issue Denny O'Neil wrote "Tomb of the Ice Giants", of which Joe Orlando was "very proud"--as well he might be. Although the Stranger often didn't act in keeping with his mysterious atmosphere, this story about an invasion by giants of ice, superbly drawn by Aparo, was one of the best thrillers yet--and happily, the teenagers did not appear this time! Dr. Thirteen and his wife did, as always, and so did Tala--but this time, in a truly unique reversal, she actually rescued Marie from the giants! But O'Neil was drawn away by other projects, and never did another issue.

The teenagers returned for one last fling in #9, a Sekowsky-written, Aparo-drawn tale of an African witch doctor, but both they and Tala were missing from the following #10, which introduced Gerard Conway as writer and featured a cover that was drawn in such detail by Gray Morrow that at first it didn't look like a comic book at all to me! Instead, a new villain was introduced--Tannarak, a British scientist obsessed with his desire for eternal life and willing to go to any ends to achieve his goal.

He was apparently killed at the end of the story, but turned up alive in the very next issue--which, for the first time, presented the Phantom Stranger alone without any supporting characters, including Dr. Thirteen. "Army of Evil" may well have been the Stranger's finest hour--one of two, anyway--as the Stranger pursued an army of the damned to a pyramid in Israel with the aid of the beautiful Lynn Berg. It all turned out to be a plot by aliens from outer space, but Conway made it really fit, right up to the explosion at the end that killed the aliens and (apparently) Tannarak, and drove Lynn out of her senses.

In fact, the Phantom Stranger and Dr. Thirteen were to appear together only once more--for in #12 Thirteen was given a back-up strip drawn by Tony De Zuniga, where he once more could become an intelligent exposer of supernatural fakes. The strip's most historic moment occured in #14's "Spectre of the Stalking Swamp" (which actually got the cover) in which Dr. Thirteen traced a bogus swamp monster to the machinations of the mad Dr. Zachary Nail. (Ironically, that swamp was soon to be inhabited by a real Swamp Thing, who himself clashed with Nail in the eleventh issue of his own book!)

But, now on his own, the Phantom Stranger was free to take off in his own direction--which he did in possibly the best story Kanigher, now badly sinking, has written in recent years. "A Child of Death", in #13, was a truly horrifying tale of atomic testing--Tala appeared once again, with as little significance in the plot as in most of Kanigher's pieces, but for once she really fit in as she symbolized the threat of atomic war in a very dramatic ending.

And when Len Wein took over as regular writer in #14, the Stranger really soared to new heights--particularly in #15's "The Iron Messiah", about a robot African god, and especially #17's "Like a Ghost from the Ashes", the other serious contender for the best story of the series, in which the Stranger met a blind girl, Cassandra Craft, and defeated Tannarak's attempt to raise the legendary phoenix in 26 pages of stunning Aparo art. (Tannarak was "killed" once more, but by this time the readers must have known better...)

But by now the Phantom Stranger was gradually learning of the existence of a "Dark Circle" of evil sorcerers, and his ultimate battle with it began in #22. It lasted three issues, in which he enlisted the aid of Cassandra, Tannarak (who joined the Stranger's side after being employed and betrayed by the Circle) and a young South American boy. The "Apocalypse" came in #24, in which the Circle summoned up Tala, but Tannarak destroyed himself, Tala, and the whole membership in one last redeeming gesture--and somehow, I think they're really gone this time.

By this time Dr. Thirteen's strip had been replaced, due to lack of interest, by an adaptation by Marvin Wolfman of "The Spawn of Frankenstein". Though the Frankenstein Monster is technically in the public domain, it's rare for a company to attempt to adapt the same character a competitor is already handling (DC has steered relatively clear of the ancient Norse gods since Marvel's version of THOR began, for example) and DC's crude attempt at what Marvel had done to much better effect met with quick and deserved failure. The only redeeming traits of this strip were the art of Mike Kaluta (which soon gave way to abysmal renderings by Bernard Baily) and one full-length story in which the Phantom Stranger and Dr. Thirteen, whose wife had been injured by the monster,

joined forces against it.

This story, regrettably, was the last to be handled by Wein and Aparo, both of whom were drawn away by other assignments. Faced with the thankless task of putting together a wholly new team for the book, Orlando scraped together Arnold Drake and Gerry Talaoc, who have since been replaced by Paul Levitz and Fred Carillo, with a few fill-ins by writer David Michelinie and artists Dreut(once more) and Mike Grell. But the mystique is definitely gone—such petty adversaries as Drs. Matthew Zorn and Nathan Seine pale alongside Tala and Tammarak (but no, I wouln't like to see the latter brought back). The Black Orchid has replaced the Frankenstein Monster as the back feature—a welcome change—and may herself giveway to Deadman, but the Phantom Stranger himself has not had a very good record since his new writers took over. He's saved President Nixon (which I'm not sure was really a service to the country) and gotten Deadman more confused than ever, but done little of any real value lately.

But, as I said so long ago, and such men as Conway and Wein proved, the book does hold possibilities. (Hmm...now that Conway's back at DC, maybe he could give it another try...) Whatever becomes of it—some say it might go monthly, others that it's teetering on the brink of cancellation; one thing's certain—when and if the Phantom Stranger does die,he will not go unmourned this time.

////END////

CIROCCO

BRUCE D. PATTERSON '79